



THINGS HAVE HAPPENED LATELY, PLATO, YEARS AGO, FARRAGO CAME TO ME ABOUT A SIN SHE FELT COULD BE REDEEMED WITH OUR HELP AND INTERVENTION.



I WAS SKEPTICAL AND WARNED HER AWAY FROM TAKING PART IN IT. SHE PERSISTED AGAINST MY WISHES AND CONTINUED TO TRAVEL INTO HELL TO HELP HIM WHENEVER SHE WAS ABLE.



AS ITS NOT MY PLACE TO INTERFERE WITH ANOTHER ANGEL'S FREE WILL, I COULD DO LITTLE BUT WATCH FROM A DISTANCE AND STEP FORWARD ONLY WHEN RULES WERE BROKEN. FOR A WHILE, HE HONESTLY SEEMED TO GET BETTER, HE BECAME INTERESTED IN LEARNING THE MEMORIES HELL HAD DENIED HIM SO THAT HE COULD BEGIN ON HIS PATH TO REDEMPTION. HE...HE EVEN BEGAN TO OCCASIONALLY SHOW SHADES OF HOW I ONCE KNEW HIM IN LIFE.



I HAD STARTED TO THINK THAT I HAD BEEN WRONG TO HAVE SUCH LITTLE FAITH IN HIM, BUT THEN TODAY...



TODAY, EVERYTHING JUST FELL APART. RIGHT IN FRONT OF THOSE WHO'D BELIEVED IN HIM STRONGEST. AND I HATE THAT HE'S MADE ME THINK THAT MAYBE HEAVEN IS TRULY OUT OF REACH FOR SOME.





MAYBE IT WAS JUST A SLIP-UP? I MEAN, NOT MANY PEOPLE CAN TURN FROM ONE THING TO ANOTHER ON THEIR FIRST TRY.



NO ONE EVER SAID REDEMPTION WAS AN EASY PATH, BUT HIS "SLIP-UP" HAS HURT MANY. FARRAGO, ESPECIALLY. HIS WRATH IS NOT A RISK THAT SHE, OR ANYONE, SHOULD TAKE AGAIN.



AH... I BET HE'S SORRY...



WELL HE CAN BE SORRY.



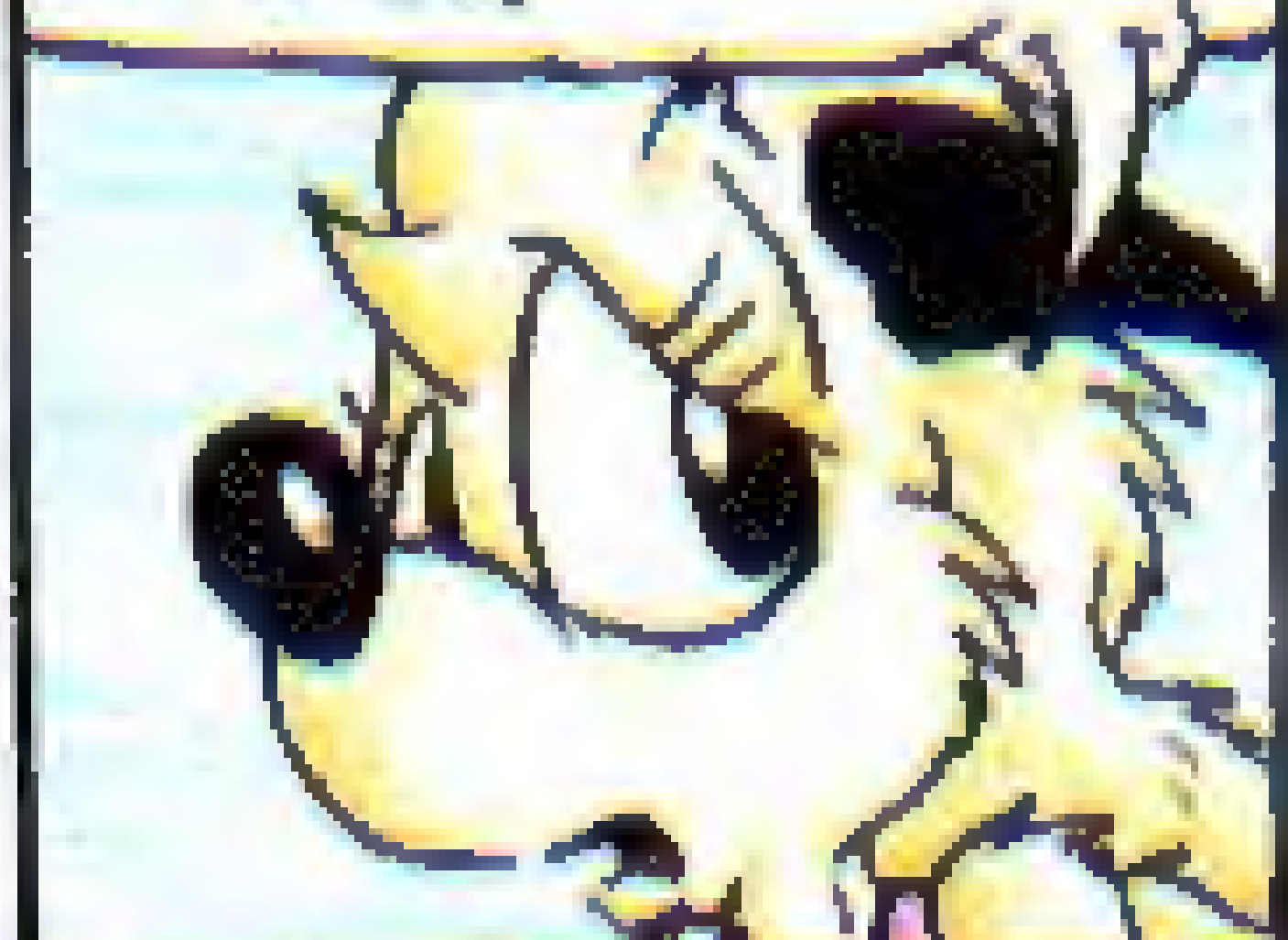
MAYBE THINKING ON WHAT HE'S LOST WILL MAKE HIM MORE APPRECIATIVE OF WHAT IT WAS WE HAD TRIED TO DO FOR HIM!



...DO YOU WANT ME TO GO, MISS CENTRAL?



NO... NO, PLATO, I DON'T WANT YOU TO GO.



I THINK I'VE BURNED ENOUGH BRIDGES FOR THE TIME BEING.



WELL, GOOD. BECAUSE I DON'T WANT YOU TO WANT ME TO GO.



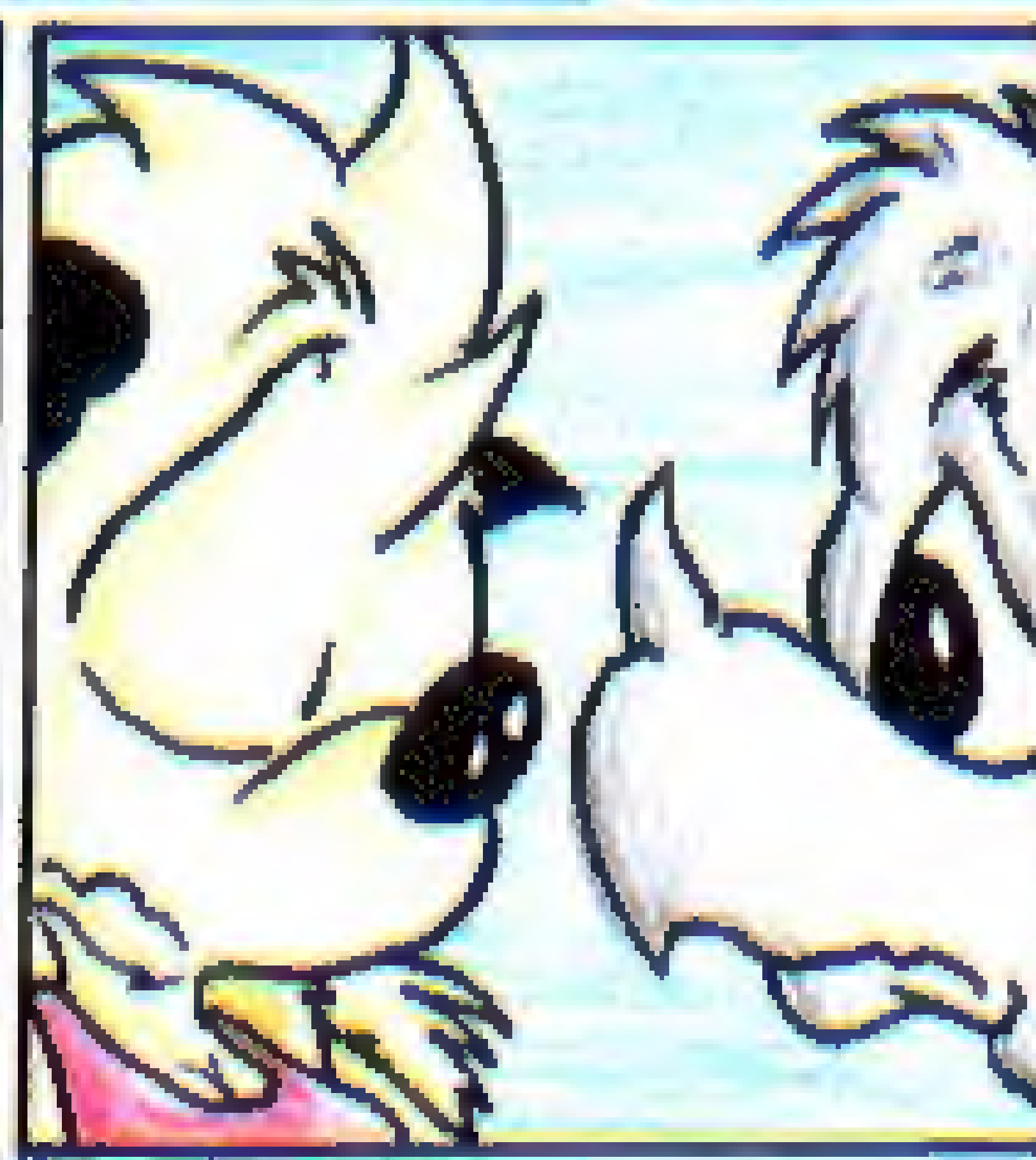
OH, WILL YOU TAKE THOSE THINGS OFF??



YOU HAVE DENDED THE MIGHTY STAG OF HIS VIRILITY. NOW HE IS YOUR BEAST OF BURDEN TO COMMAND.



I SEEM TO RECALL HIM BEING MY "BEAST OF BURDEN" BEFORE THAT. WHAT'S YOUR POINT?



WHY DO YOU STAY, PLATO?

HUH?



I KNOW THAT, TO YOU, HEAVEN IS TO BE IN ETERNAL WILLING SERVITUDE TO AN ANGEL, BUT I'VE NEVER ASKED YOU WHY.



I KIND OF ASSUMED THAT YOU ANGELS KNEW EVERYTHING ABOUT EVERYONE HERE... I DIDN'T THINK I REALLY HAD TO SAY ANYTHING.



GOD IS THE ONLY ONE WHO KNOWS ALL OF HEAVEN'S CREATURES. THE ANGELS KNOW ONLY THOSE WE'VE BEEN ASKED TO GUIDE. DESPITE OUR BEST EFFORTS, WE CAN'T BE EVERYWHERE AT ONCE, PLATO. JUST LIKE TODAY...



WELL LET'S NOT GET ON THAT SUBJECT AGAIN. TO ANSWER YOUR QUESTION, THIS IS HEAVEN TO ME BECAUSE, WHEN YOU GET DOWN TO IT, ITS ALL I KNOW.



...ALL YOU KNOW?



WELL, TO UNDERSTAND THAT, MISS CENTRAL, YOU HAVE TO FIRST UNDERSTAND WHAT I CAME FROM AND WHAT LED ME HERE. WANNA HEAR A STORY?



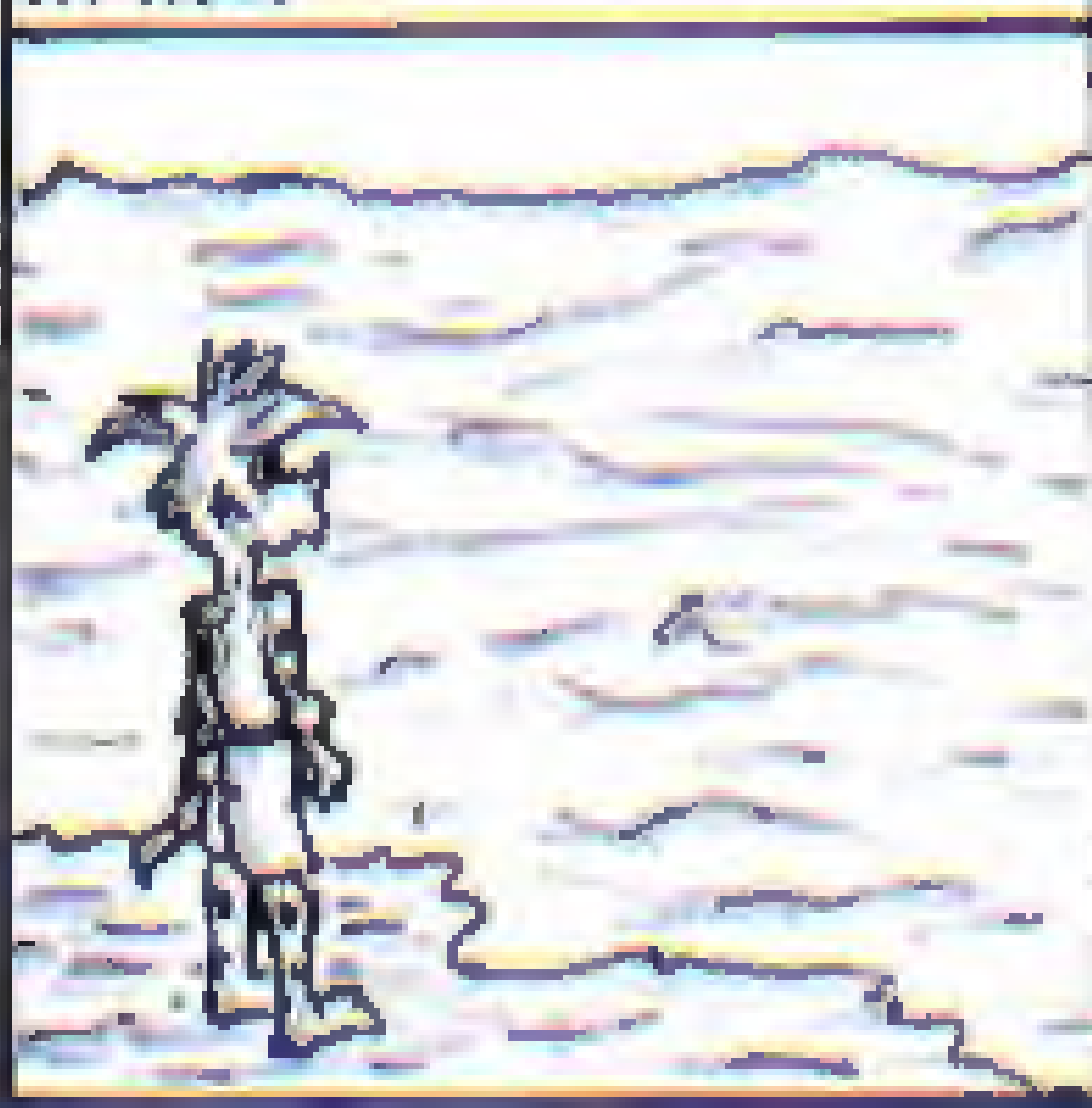
MY FAMILY AND I WERE PART OF A SMALL IN-THE-MIDDLE-OF-NOWHERE VILLAGE THAT KEPT TO ITSELF WHENEVER POSSIBLE. WE ALL WERE PRETTY IGNORANT WHEN IT CAME TO THE OUTSIDE WORLD OR THAT THERE EVEN WAS AN OUTSIDE WORLD



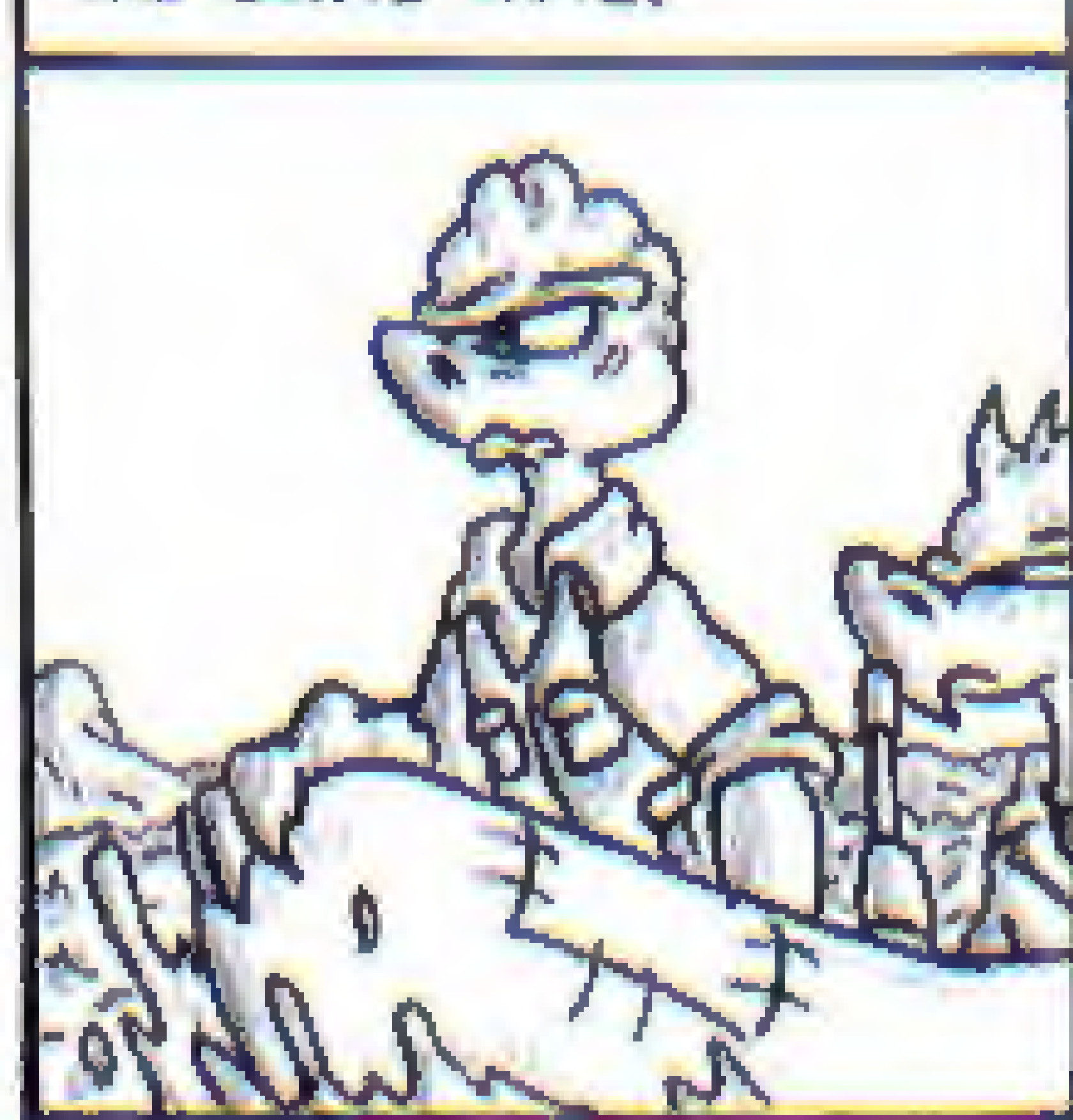
BUT THOSE THAT HAD FOUNDED OUR COMMUNITY ASSURED US THAT WE WANTED NO PART OF WHAT WENT ON OUT THERE.



THERE WAS HATRED, THEY SAID, AND WAR, AND KILLING. THINGS THAT CREATURES OF PEACE JUST WEREN'T PREPARED TO HANDLE AT ALL.



AND SO WE KEPT ON KEEPING TO OURSELVES. THEN ONE DAY, THE BOATS CAME.

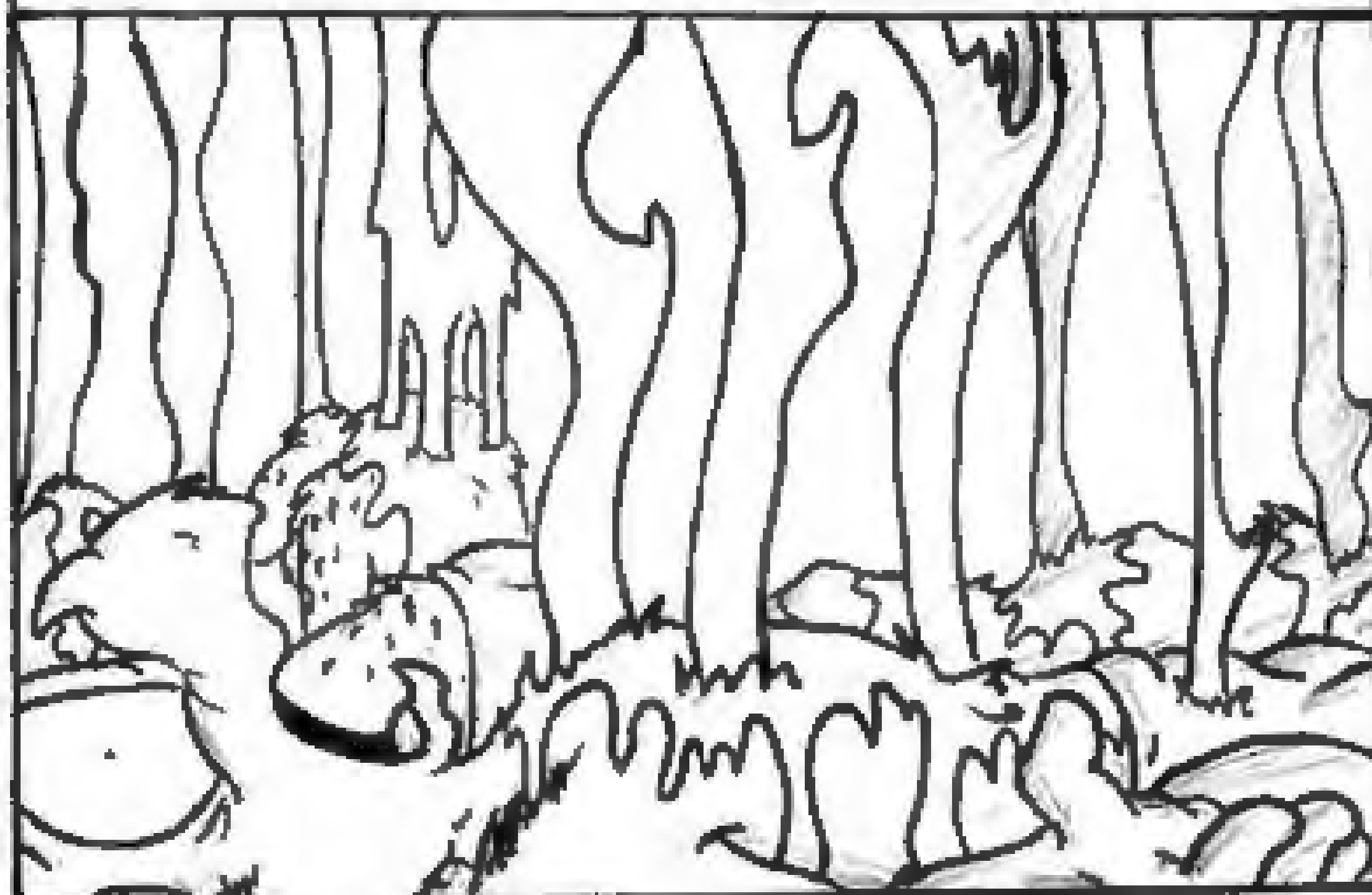


THEIR NATION WAS IN COMPLETE ANARCHY, THEY SAID. THEY WERE, VERY SOON, GOING TO START A WAR TO PUT A STOP TO IT, BUT FIRST THEY NEEDED TO INCREASE THEIR NUMBERS WITH OTHERS WILLING TO FIGHT FOR THEIR CAUSE. THEY HAD DECIDED TO ASK US.



OUR FOUNDERS CAME FORWARD TO EXPLAIN THAT THEY COULD NOT PUT THEIR PEOPLE IN DANGER OVER A WAR THAT WAS NOT OURS TO FIGHT. WE COULD, HOWEVER, PROVIDE THEM WITH SUPPLIES AND SHELTER IF THEY NEEDED IT.

THAT DIDN'T GO OVER SO WELL...



THEY TOOK WHATEVER THEY WANTED AND SHOT ANYBODY THAT GOT IN THEIR WAY. I WAS YOUNG AT THE TIME AND BARELY UNDERSTOOD WHAT DEATH WAS LET ALONE WHAT WAS HAPPENING.

AFTER THEY KILLED MY MOM, MY SISTER, AND MY DAD, I BEGGED THEM NOT TO SHOOT ME TOO. THEIR GUNS TERRIFIED ME.



FOR WHATEVER REASON THEY HAD, THEY DECIDED NOT TO. THEY LOADED ME ONTO ONE OF THEIR BOATS WITH THINGS THEY'D TAKEN AND WE LEFT THE VILLAGE BEHIND. ONCE WE GOT BACK TO THEIR COUNTRY, I WAS TRADED OFF FOR MORE AMMUNITION AND GUNS.



MISTER GRIMM WAS MY FIRST MASTER. HE WAS GETTING OLD AND NEEDED A HOUSEBOY.



THIS WAS JUST AFTER "THE WORLD WAS MADE TO CHANGE HANDS". MISTER GRIMM WAS WORKING ON BUILDING A NEW CIVILIZATION OUT OF WHAT WAS LEFT OVER.



HE TAUGHT ME EVERYTHING I KNOW ABOUT COOKING...



CLEANING...



AND FIXING THINGS.



ONCE I GOT A HANDLE ON IT, I ACTUALLY STARTED TO ENJOY IT. MISTER GRIMM'S APPROVAL WHEN I DID SOMETHING RIGHT JUST MADE ME TRY HARDER.



I DID IT FOR FIVE YEARS. BUT, AFTER "THE WORLD WAS MADE TO CHANGE HANDS"....



SOME PEOPLE MADE IT CLEAR THAT THEY DIDN'T WANT CIVILIZATION TO BE REBUILT.



SINCE I WAS "PROPERTY", I WAS GIVEN TO HIS CLOSEST LIVING RELATIVE.



HIS NECE, MISS AMANDA.



AMANDA HAD THE SAME EXPECTATIONS OF ME THAT HER UNCLE DID AND PUT ME TO WORK AROUND HER HOUSE IMMEDIATELY.



SHE WASN'T PATIENT LIKE MISTER GRIMM WAS, AND SOMETIMES SHE WENT OUT OF HER WAY TO FIND MY MISTAKES. NOTHING I DID WAS EVER GOOD ENOUGH FOR HER



... AND IT MADE ME HATE HER.



BUT IN HATING HER, I LEARNED TO ADORE HER. SHE MADE ME INTO A PERFECTIONIST IN ALL MY TASKS, TRYING TO RISE TO THE CHALLENGE OF DOING A JOB TO HER SATISFACTION.



AND THEN ONE DAY...



SHE REVEALED TO ME...



A COMPLETELY DIFFERENT KIND OF SERVICE...





AND WHILE THE WORLD OUTSIDE CONTINUED TO EAT ITSELF ALIVE, WE FOUND COMFORT IN ONE ANOTHER.



SHE HAD OTHER LOVERS, OF COURSE. SOME FOR ROMANCE, OTHERS FOR 'INSURANCE'.



I WAS NEVER JEALOUS, THOUGH. I KNEW WHERE MY PLACE WAS.

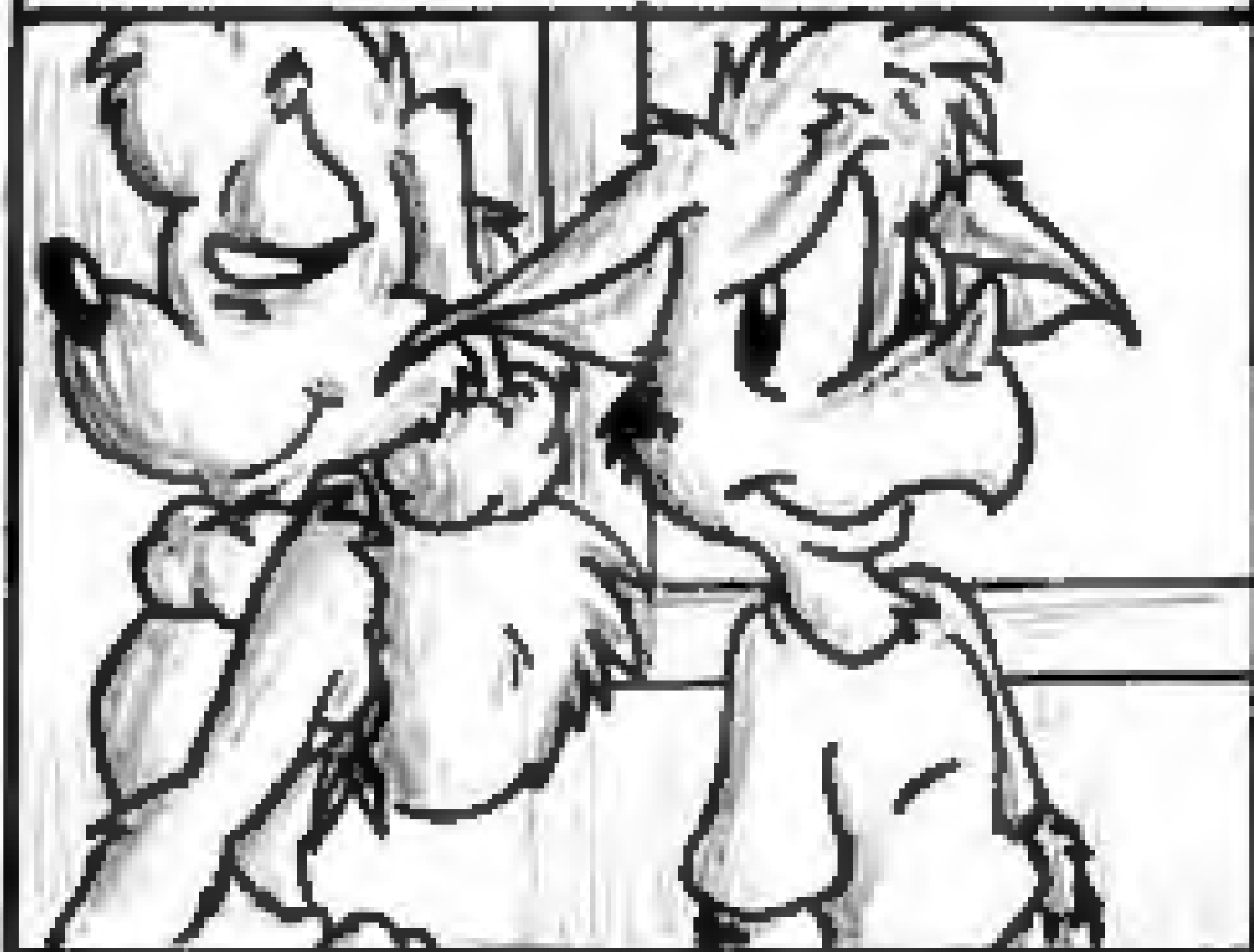


BUT WHENEVER SHE NEEDED ME, I WAS ALWAYS THERE WITHOUT A SECOND THOUGHT.



IT MADE ME HAPPY TO FEEL NEEDED BY SOMEONE, EVEN IF SHE DIDN'T LOVE ME. IT DIDN'T MATTER. I WAS PERFECTLY HAPPY TO SERVE AMANDA'S EVERY NEED WITHOUT ARGUMENT.

I STOOD BESIDE HER DURING THE GOOD TIMES...



...AND I HELPED HER SNEAK AWAY THE NIGHT THE SAME ANGRY MOB THAT HAD KILLED HER UNCLE BURNED HER HOME DOWN. HER "INSURANCE" COULD NO LONGER PROTECT HER.



WE USED WHAT WAS LEFT IN HER SAVINGS TO MOVE INTO THE UPSTAIRS LOFT OF A BOARDING HOUSE TO HIDE. WHEN SHE FELL ILL, I DID MY BEST TO CARE FOR HER.



THE STATE OF THE WORLD MADE DOCTORS HARD TO FIND AND MORE THAN WE COULD AFFORD. WITHOUT HELP, AMANDA GOT WORSE AND WORSE. NOTHING I DID HELPED ANYMORE. SOME NIGHTS SHE WOULD JUST THRASH AND SCREAM.



ON THE NIGHTS SHE DID SLEEP, I STAYED UP TO WATCH OVER HER AND TO PRAY SHE WOULD RECOVER.



I EVEN OFFERED MY LIFE TO GOD IN EXCHANGE FOR HER GETTING BETTER, BUT HE NEVER ANSWERED...



...AND AMANDA SLIPPED AWAY ONE NIGHT.



NOW THAT I DIDN'T BELONG TO ANYONE, I WAS FREE TO DO WHAT I WANTED, BUT I HAD NOWHERE TO GO. MY PURPOSE WAS GONE.



AND TO MAKE MATTERS WORSE, WHATEVER HAD KILLED AMANDA WAS NOW KILLING ME TOO. EXCEPT THERE WAS NO ONE THERE TO CARE FOR ME OR PRAY FOR ME. I WAS ALL ALONE NOW.



IT WASN'T ANYONE'S FAULT I ENDED UP THAT WAY, REALLY. WITH AS BAD AS CIRCUMSTANCES ALL OVER WERE, YOU COULDN'T PUT THE BLAME ON ANY ONE PERSON. SO I COMFORTED MYSELF WITH THE IDEA THAT EVEN THOUGH I WAS VERY SICK, SOMEONE SOMEWHERE WAS WORSE OFF THAN I WAS.



ONE NIGHT WHEN THE PAIN WAS AT ITS WORST, I HAD A LONG TALK WITH THE ALMIGHTY. AFTER ALL, HE WAS THE ONLY ONE I HAD LEFT TO TALK TO AND HE ALWAYS LISTENS.



I TOLD HIM THAT WHILE MY LIFE WASN'T EXACTLY SOMETHING MOST PEOPLE WOULD BE PROUD OF...



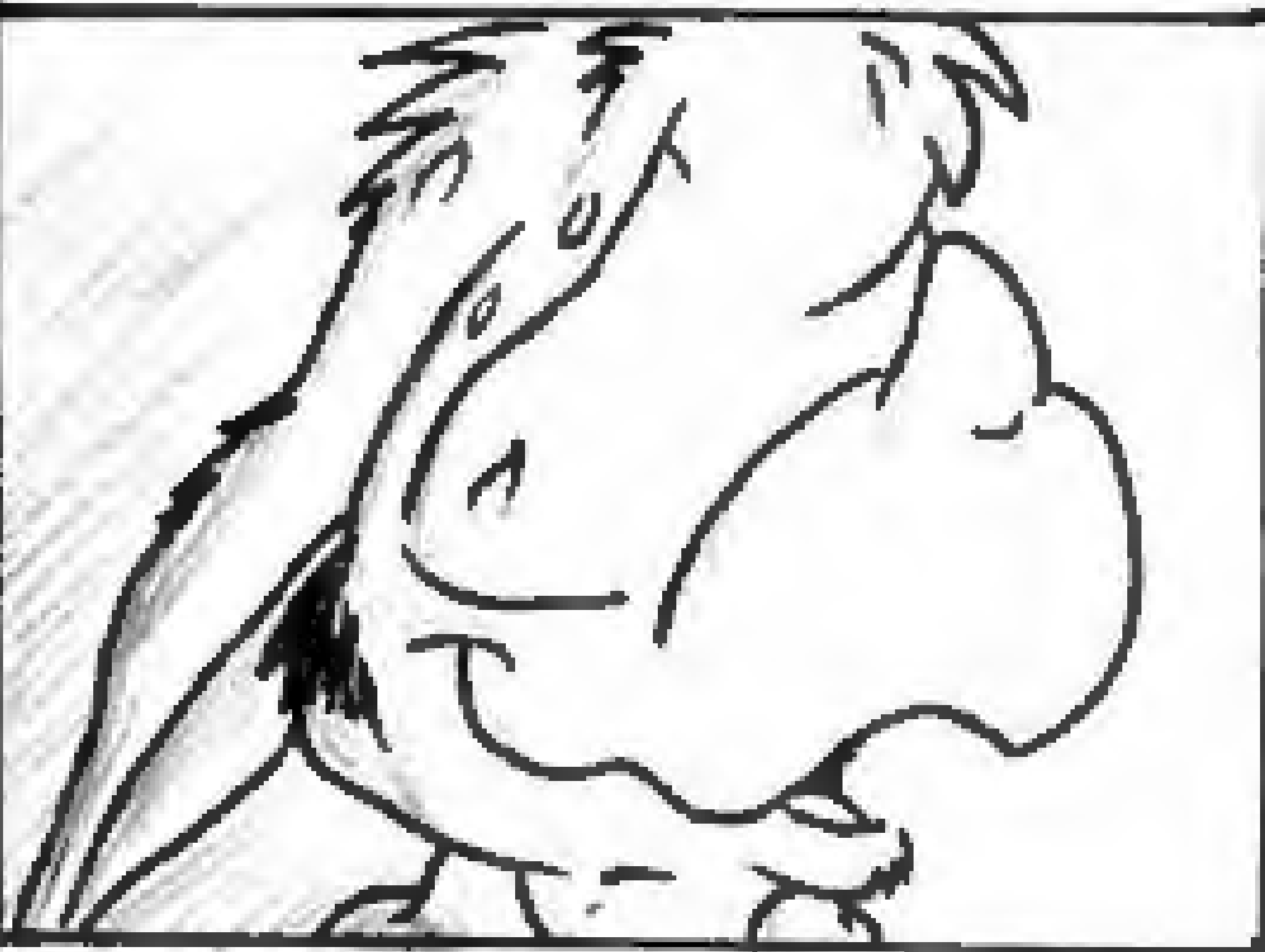
...I DIDN'T HAVE MANY THINGS I LOOKED BACK ON AND WISHED I HADN'T DONE.



I REGRETTED, OF COURSE, THAT MY FAMILY HAD TO DIE, AND I TOLD HIM THAT I HOPED MOM, DAD, AND MY SISTER ALONG WITH EVERYBODY ELSE WHO WAS KILLED THAT DAY WERE BEING TREATED NICELY.

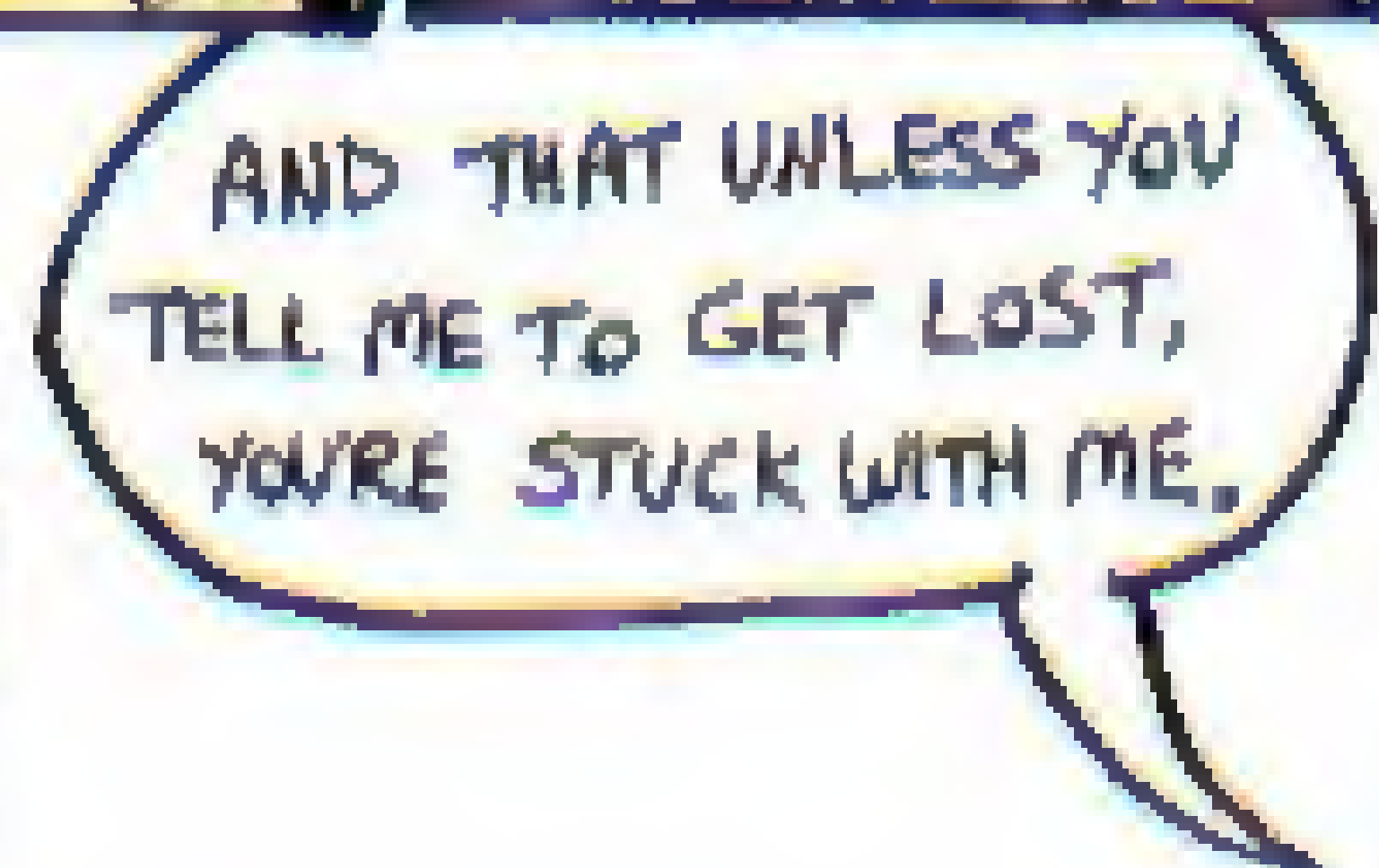
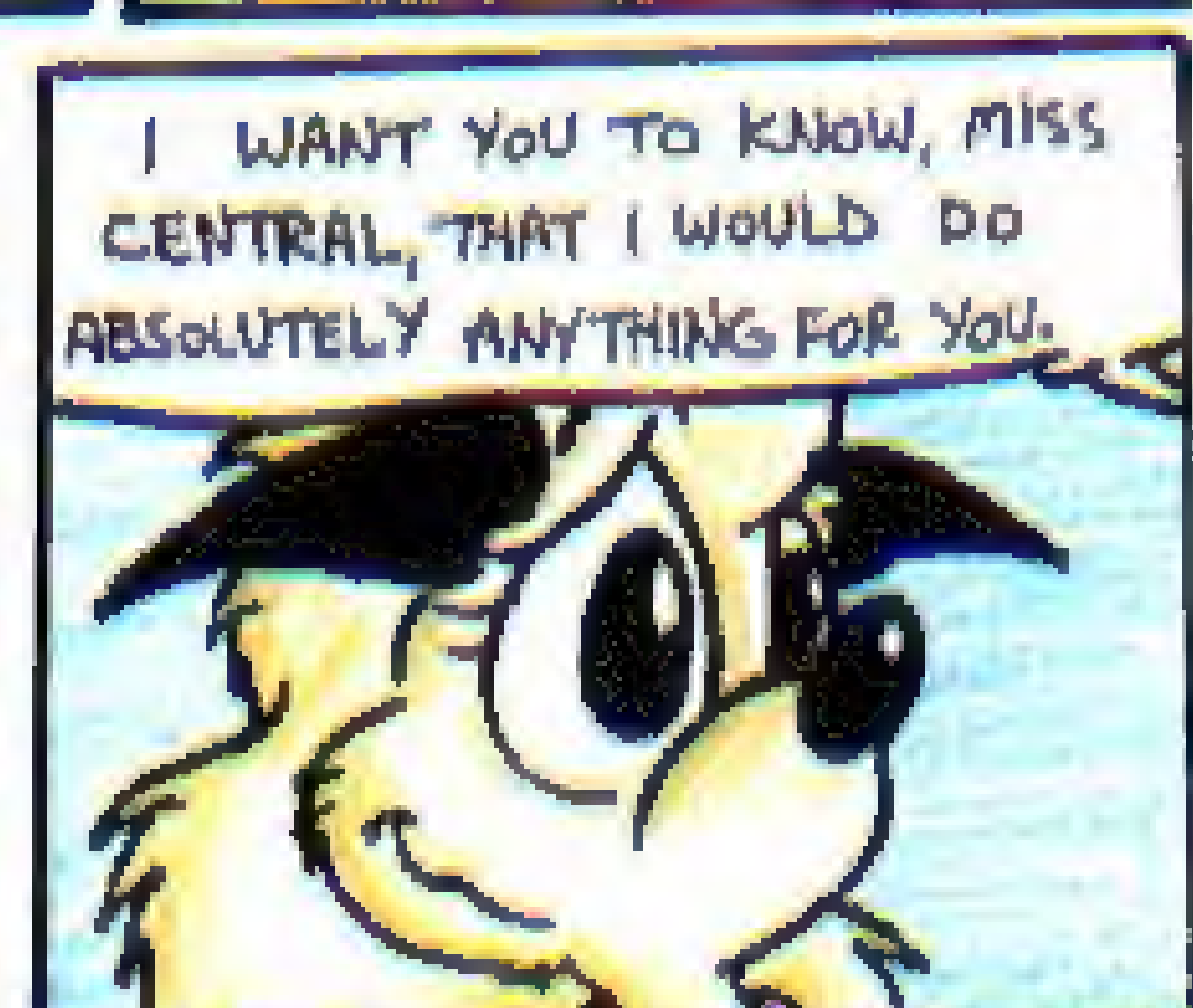
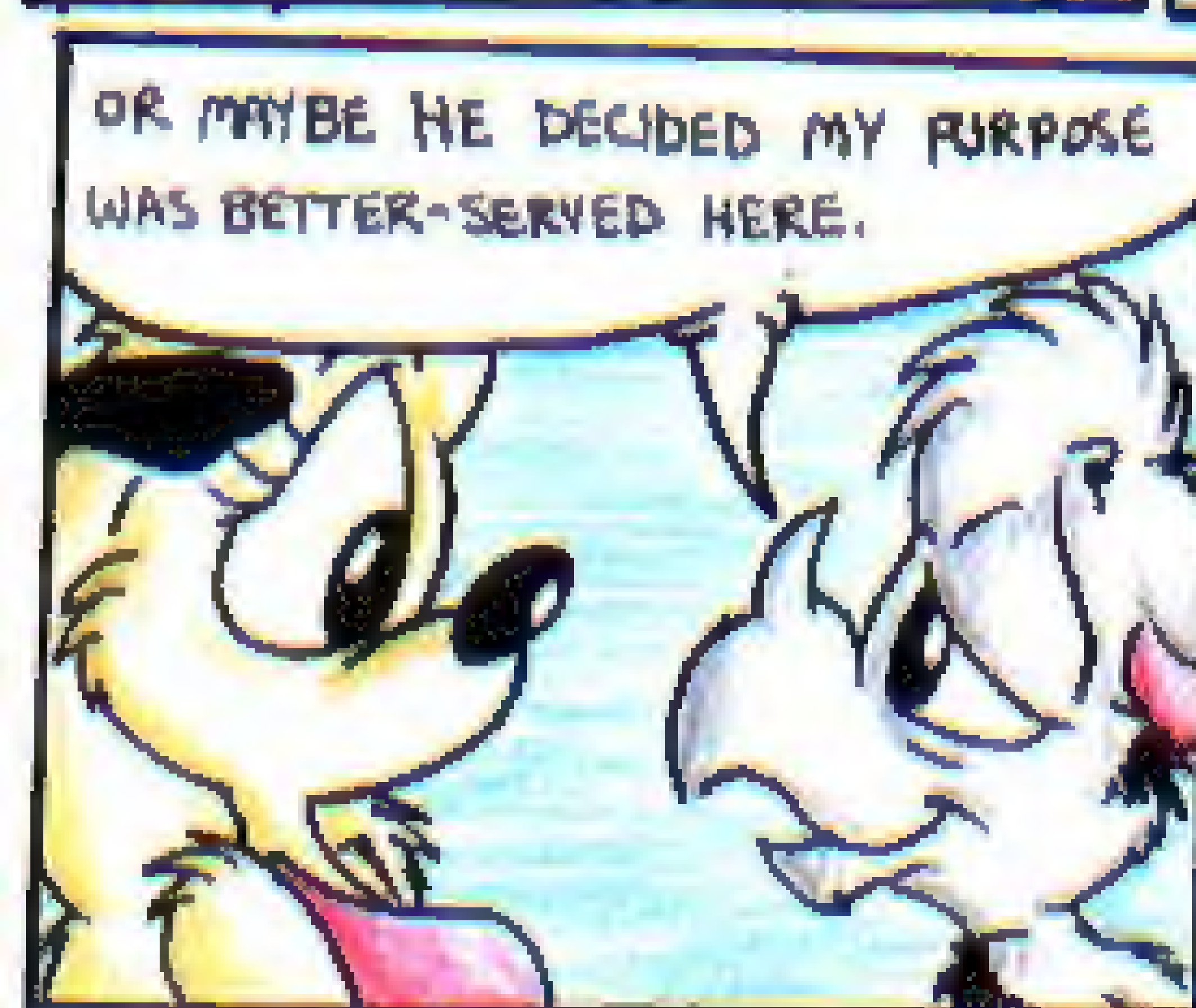
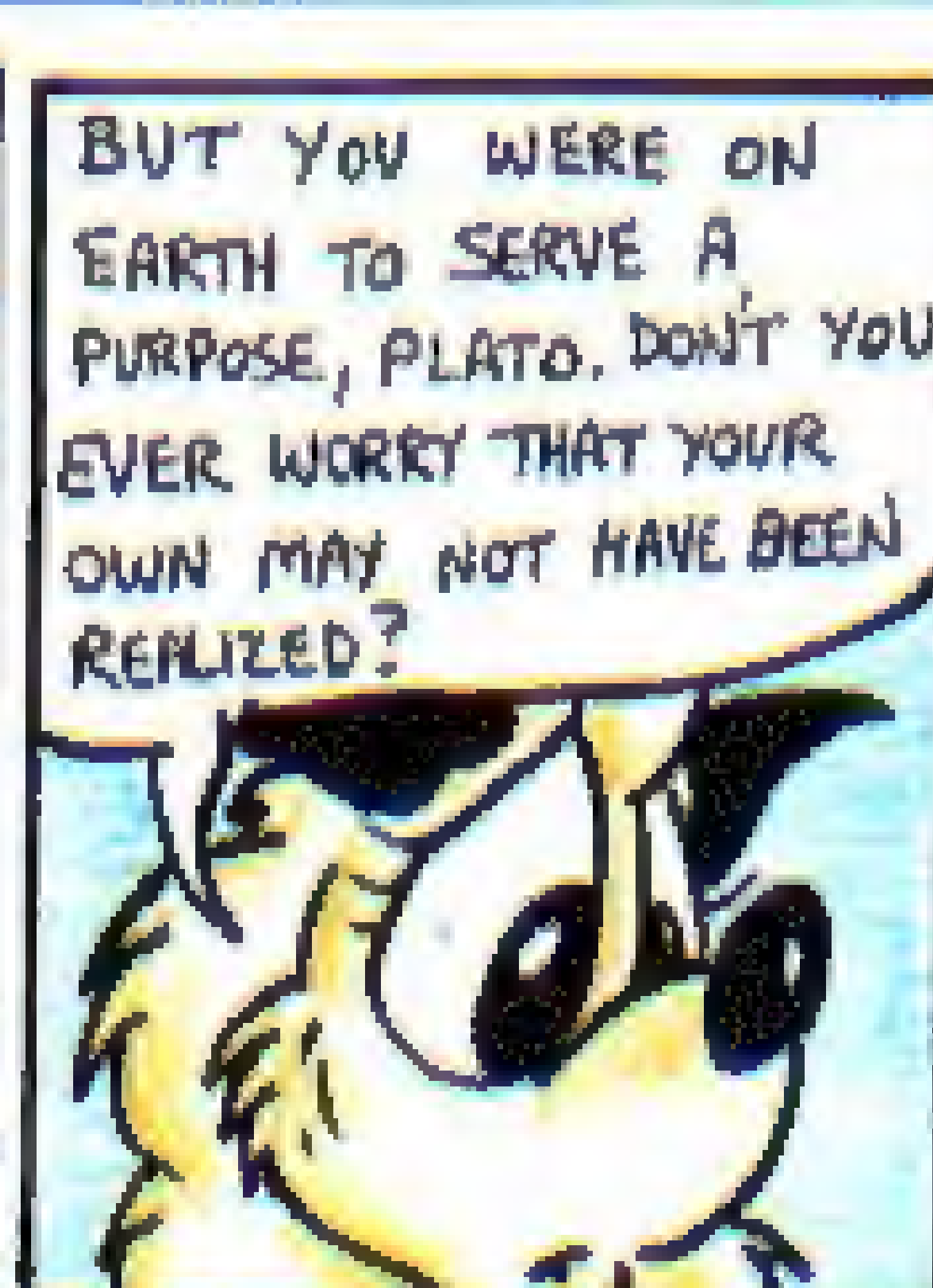


AND THEN I THANKED HIM FOR HELPING ME FIND MY LOT IN LIFE EVEN THOUGH HE WAS BUSY RUNNING EVERYTHING ELSE.



I THINK THE LAST THING I ASKED BEFORE I DIED WAS WHETHER OR NOT THE ANGELS NEEDED ANY SERVANTS.





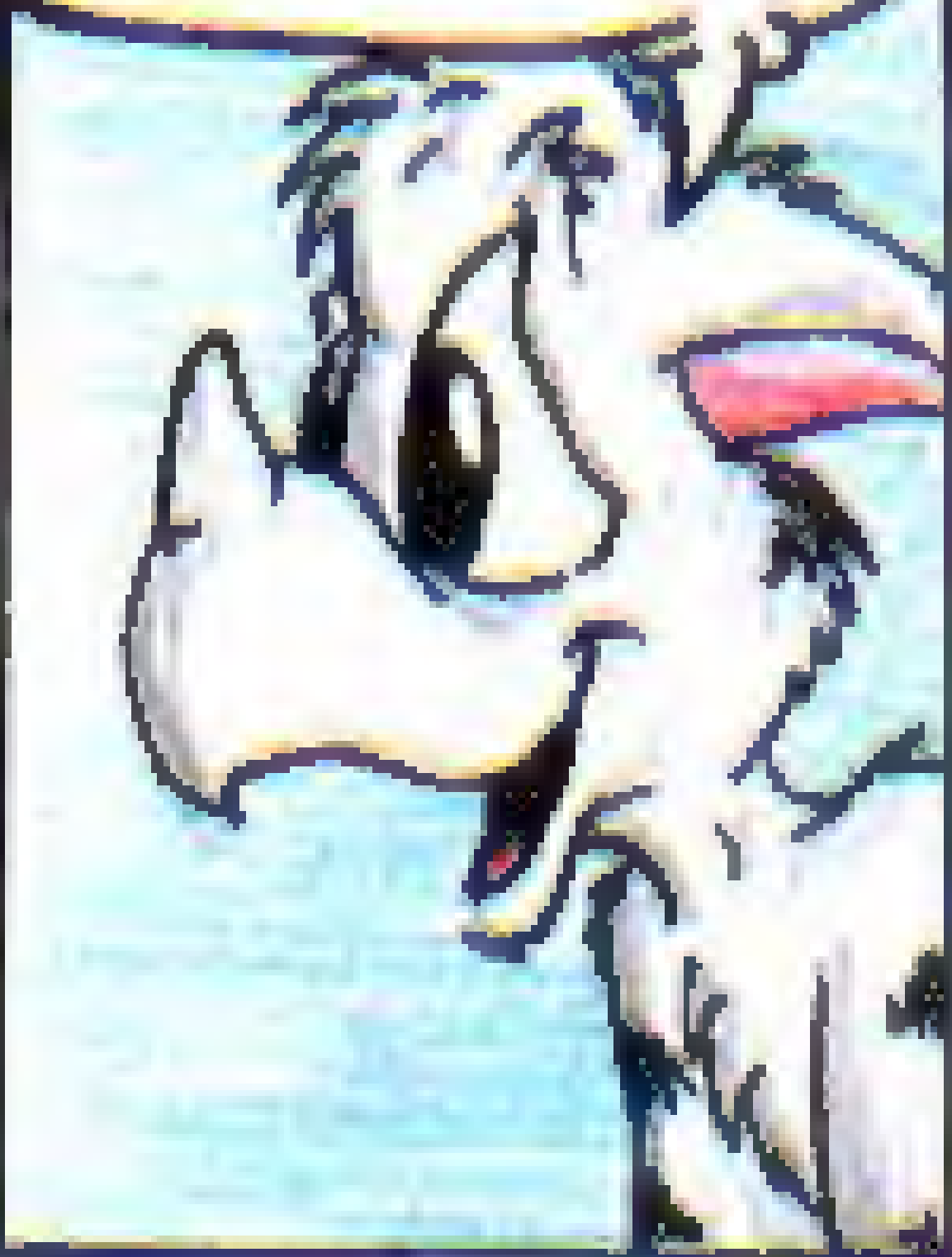
BESIDES! SOMEBODY'S GOT
TO BE HERE TO REMIND
YOU CONSTANTLY THAT
YOU'RE NOT THE HAG QUEEN
OF THE BITCHLAND.



KWAP!



DOES THIS MEAN
THE HUNT'S ON
AFTER ALL...?



YOU GET
A FIVE-SECOND
HEAD START.



TTFN
1/20/06
0154 PST
M. J. H.